

**Testimony of Kelo Chao and Daniel Southerland**  
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**Before the House Committee On International Relations**  
**Subcommittee on Africa, Global Human Rights and International Operations and**  
**the Subcommittee on Asia and the Pacific**  
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Mr. Chairman and members of the subcommittees, I greatly appreciate the opportunity to appear before you today to talk about the combined efforts of the Voice of America (VOA) and Radio Free Asia (RFA) to get news and information into North Korea as well as to the tens of thousands of North Korean refugees in China.

I am pleased to be joined today by fellow international broadcaster Dan Southerland, a well-known and widely respected professional journalist who has been with RFA since its inception. Also behind me are several other colleagues including the directors of the Korean Services of both RFA and VOA. Together we hope to give you a full picture of the efforts of the Broadcasting Board of Governors (BBG) to deliver information that empowers the people of North Korea. North Korea presents one of the most challenging broadcast environments for BBG broadcasting. Because none of the other major Western international broadcasters (BBC, Deutsche Welle, Radio France International, etc.) provides any programming in the Korean language, VOA and RFA broadcasts are the only uncensored sources of information that directly reach the Stalinist country – where distortions of news must be countered by accurate and comprehensive reporting. Without us, all North Koreans, even its elites, are cut off from basic domestic and international news as well as how Americans live, how our society works, how our government functions, and what our policies are.

As President Bush has indicated, North Korea is arming itself with nuclear weapons while starving its citizens. In this regard, by countering Pyongyang's propaganda, VOA and RFA's programming contributes to the denuclearization of the Korean peninsula and the struggle for human rights in North Korea.

Our mission is that of all U.S. international broadcasting – to promote and sustain freedom and democracy by broadcasting accurate and objective news and information. Together we broadcast a total of seven hours a day: RFA four and VOA three. VOA's programming is an all-inclusive range of news and information about North Korea, the United States and the world. RFA's mission is to substitute for local media in countries where a free press is not tolerated. In North Korea, RFA broadcasts almost exclusively news and information about North Korea. VOA and RFA endeavor to be the most trusted media voices in North Korea. Together this "one-two punch" makes a superb team.

## **Media Environment and Transmission**

The extremely closed environment in which North Koreans live has made this population desperate for news about their country and the world. Officially, all personal radios must have a fixed dial and be registered with government security offices. If radios are found to be owned illegally or altered to allow their owners to hear VOA, RFA and other foreign broadcasts, imprisonment can be expected. The North Korean government reformed its criminal code on April 29, 2004 to specifically punish those who listen to foreign broadcasting. As a result, anyone caught listening to foreign broadcasts can be jailed from two to five years.

North Korea has attempted to jam VOA and RFA broadcasts from time to time, although the effectiveness of jamming varies. A recent monitoring report indicated that a majority of RFA broadcasts can be heard with a good signal through the jamming. Approximately half of VOA transmissions can be heard and half are moderately to heavily jammed. The regime has also made statements attacking VOA and RFA on a regular basis. North Korea's official news agency, the Korean Central News Agency, has denounced VOA and RFA for airing stories about "a lot of defectors from the North."

North Koreans use medium and short wave radio. Medium wave is more readily available and listening is higher during the middle of the night when it is safer to listen. Safety from detection is the biggest challenge in this operating environment, but research shows that the audience is motivated and will risk not only listening to foreign broadcasts, but also purchasing more than one radio. In recent years, studies suggest that China is a growing source of radios and other electronics, with an active black market trade across the border. Many defectors report having owned illegal radios with tunable dials hidden from authorities and a larger number (33 percent of defectors surveyed in 2005) report that they adjusted their radios to receive foreign broadcasts while in North Korea. One man, a former factory worker and now a defector in the South, reported owning three smuggled radios. "I had them registered and their frequencies fixed after buying them, but I listened to the radio by cutting a piece of the internal wire and connecting or disconnecting it," he said. "I would have been in big trouble if I'd been caught listening to unauthorized channels."

Dire conditions within the country have left many North Koreans with high levels of distrust in their government and its domestic media. Asked about their top media sources of information within North Korea, 19 percent of defectors in a 2004 study said non-domestic radio was second only to domestic television. We now find considerable evidence of Korean escapees making calls to relatives on cell phones from China. Indeed, 35 percent of defectors surveyed in 2005 said they communicate with their relatives on cell phones.

Internet usage in North Korea is rare according to recent surveys. Nevertheless, both VOA and RFA have well-developed North Korea Web pages that stream all of its broadcasting. The sites are updated daily. Research now shows that these sites are

accessed weekly by six to seven percent of North Korean defectors recently interviewed and now living in the South.

Currently, BBG broadcasts a total of seven program hours daily to North Korea: three from VOA and four from RFA. We have been at that level since 2003 when both VOA and RFA doubled their broadcasts to North Korea. A total of 8,942 transmitter hours are used annually for these broadcasts on 14 separate shortwave frequencies and one medium wave frequency. North Koreans can hear VOA on medium wave (AM) and shortwave. RFA is broadcast only on shortwave.

### **Programming**

Surveys of defectors indicate that we are already having an impact on the Korean peninsula and with Korean refugees hiding inside China, providing programming on issues the North Korean government is not sharing with its citizens, such as the truth about the famine, the state of human rights, the six party talks, economic development, religion, health, and news about the region. With this information, the people of North Korea will be better equipped to navigate their lives and their country.

We attract our audience in North Korea by creating a unique and compelling blend of news and information programming and then delivering our signals through an array of shortwave and AM transmitters. In addition, we broadcast during the hours when it is easiest for listeners to tune in to us. Darkness is indeed our friend. Not only does the night provide better atmospheric conditions for our shortwave signals, it is also the time when North Koreans have the greatest degree of privacy and find it easiest to listen surreptitiously. We know from listeners that they listen to our broadcasts under blankets and do not even tell their spouses that they listen for fear of reprisals against them and their families.

### **VOA Broadcasts**

VOA's programming on North Korea benefits greatly by VOA's ability to send reporters into both China and North Korea. In fact, VOA Korean reporter Young Kweon Kim spent two weeks in September of this year along the Tumen River area between North Korea and China. His fascinating reports focus on how North Koreans manage to slip back and forth across the border, how they survive once inside China and how North Koreans and Chinese trade goods along the border. This trip emulates the successful trip to Yanbian of VOA Korean Service Chief In-sop Han in 2000. Back to the present: VOA Beijing correspondent Luis Ramirez managed to join an excursion trip into Pyongyang this week. These trips build on the amazing reporting done by VOA reporter William Chien a year or two ago when he produced a video report on the trafficking of North Koreans inside China.

In addition to Chien's award-winning report that was shown on national television in South Korea, VOA's radio programming to North Korea emphasizes the most important subjects in U.S. relations with North Korea, particularly Pyongyang's nuclear weapons

program, the dire human rights situation and the plight of North Korean defectors. Featuring defectors is a key focus of VOA's programs. VOA also reports on and explains U.S. policy toward North Korea in its regular coverage, as well as broadcasts editorials on U.S. policy.

Our challenge is not made easier by the bifurcated audience in the north and the south. Of course the highly unstable North Korea is our top priority. But we do not take the South for granted. In South Korea, anti-American feelings are on the rise, especially among the younger generation. A recent poll suggested more than half of the youth of South Korea would side with North Korea against the U.S. in the event of a war. For this reason VOA designs its internet and television content to be relevant to the entire Korean peninsula.

### **RFA Broadcasts**

In service to its listeners, RFA is increasing its original content to its broadcasts and listening closely to the needs of its audience. We know through audience research that RFA's audience wants reliable information about their own country and issues that impact their lives. They want stories that put a personal face on what is happening to North Koreans, stories about the lives of defectors and the challenges facing them, economic reform in other communist countries, defectors' personal stories, language differences between North and South Korea, and Korean music, both northern and southern.

Research suggests that defectors do not always understand South Korean terminology, so our listeners want to better understand these differences. RFA has done a number of programs on language. RFA has also broadcast regular stories about defectors and the East German experience. Research also shows that North Koreans, even those who are critical of the government, have an extremely hard time understanding nuclear issues in general and the Western perspective in particular. RFA strives to provide its listeners the context necessary to increase understanding of the nuclear issue.

With so many North Koreans fleeing to China, RFA is regularly providing news and information on human trafficking, particularly targeting girls and women who are the most vulnerable to trafficking once in China. RFA also broadcasts weekly features on the lives of North Korean defectors in the South, families' letters to abductees in the North, refugees' stories, and Korean cultural programming.

### **Impact**

Through our adherence to Western journalistic standards and through our objective and accurate reporting, VOA and RFA earn the credibility that allow us to connect with our target audience – and the results are heartwarming. Listen to what is being said about us:

- German physician Dr. Norbert Vollertsen, who spent 18 months in North Korea providing humanitarian aid has told VOA Korean that "the North Korean people

desperately need VOA's help and encouragement. According to my friend who is still based in Pyongyang, you are not only the Voice of America but also the voice of the victims of the North Korean dictatorship. Every morning when I was in Pyongyang I was listening to VOA news - and my North Korean counterparts were sitting beside me. You were their main source of information about the outside world!"

- “How are you dear RFA reporter, sir? You have given courage and strength to defectors...I am sending my tribute from the bottom of my heart...We defectors, all of us, are listening to your broadcasts every day...If we miss one single day, we feel emptiness. I have been in China for three years. I have been roaming many places in China...I have witnessed too many cases of how much these refugees suffer mentally and physically. Chinese treatment of us, this inhumanity, must be condemned by the international community. I am too angry that I wasted 40 years of my life in North Korea...It is a society in which basic freedom is ignored...It is a wasteland of human rights. People get nothing, not even basic needs.” A letter from a North Korean listener in China.

Even though Pyongyang tries to jam both of us, research from InterMedia Research and reports from defectors provide sufficient proof that both stations are getting through. A series of three defector surveys since 2003 have shown consistently that both RFA and VOA have regular listeners in North Korea. Defectors say they and many others in North Korea knew how to alter the fixed dials of local short wave radios to listen. In addition, a number of visitors to North Korea, including a former U.S. diplomat and a senior editor of the VOA Korean Service, reported that some VOA Korean language signals were clearly audible, despite jamming.

The BBG has commissioned three 200-person defector surveys from 2003 to 2005. The results of these surveys vary with each group of defectors interviewed and cannot be projected onto the entire population of North Korea. The 2004 InterMedia survey reported 8.5% regular listenership for VOA and 7.5% for RFA. A May 2005 InterMedia survey of North Korean defectors reported that although 60% are aware of regulations against listening to foreign broadcasts and more than a third (39 percent) know someone punished for doing so, 10% listen to VOA and 3.5% listen to RFA at least once a week while they are in North Korea. These listener figures jump to 23.5% a week for VOA and 11.5% for RFA once the defectors are inside China where transition listening is very common. Although all radios in North Korea have dials fixed to the state radio's medium wave frequency, defectors surveyed by InterMedia report that 23% of the people in North Korea personally modify their radios to receive foreign broadcasts and an additional 21% know others who fix their radios.

**Conclusion**

From programming featuring interviews with North Korean defectors who describe life in North Korea, China and South Korea, to reports on U.S.-North Korea relations featuring commentary by U.S. Government officials, members of Congress, academics, members of think tanks and other informed individuals, VOA and RFA are providing an important lifeline to the outside world for North Koreans. Reports on North Korea's international activities – and on how the rest of the world views North Korea – further enlighten its own citizens of their country's broader international agenda.

With your continued support, the dedicated group of broadcasters of VOA and RFA's Korean Services will continue to reach out to North Korean citizens every day. Thank you again for holding this hearing, and we will be happy to answer any questions you may have.